

WOMEN ARE SO SILLY

By Walter Prichard Eaton

The Professor of Romance Languages Learns the Language of Romance.

"BAH!" said Mrs. Augustus Penhallo, and again: "Bah!" Prof. Augustus Penhallo looked up from the glass of ginger ale and lemon which he had been shaking and endeavoring to detect for himself the cause of her exclamation.

He did not do it at once, and sighed—ever so slightly.

Prof. Penhallo and Mrs. Penhallo were sitting on the veranda of the Southmead Country Club, quite as if they were accustomed to it. They were, some years before, Penhallo's "Plane Geometry" had appeared, and then his "Solid Geometry," and both had been, and still were, best sellers in the textbook world. Nobody is compelled to buy a novel if he doesn't want to, but thousands of young men and maidens are annually compelled to buy Penhallo's geometry. Hence the Penhallos had a summer place in the Southmead and belonged to the country club and the professor played golf today. It was very warm and he had deserted the links for the shade of the veranda and the tinkle of ice in a glass, plus the occasional conversation of his wife.

Mrs. Penhallo was well adapted to be the wife of a mathematician. She was a most excellent manager, saw to all the household expenses, as well as to the disposition of the money thereafter. Her character was the most perfect of academic matters (and many others) was extensive.

Yet she was now reduced to the elementary, if expressive, monosyllable, "Bah!"

The cause of this exclamation was a female. Furthermore, this female was in close conjunction with Augustus Penhallo, Jr. He had been christened the Emperor in prep school because the first Augustus was an emperor. Augustus, Jr., carried himself even then with a certain superior aloofness. He was now 24, with a brand-new Ph. D. and an instructorship in romance languages at the University of Washington.

The Emperor wasn't naturally happy as a mixer. At the present moment, however, he appeared to be getting on very well, indeed, with one of his fellow-creatures. This fellow-creature evidently played golf rather badly, for how else should we account for the fact that the Emperor had to take her hands and place her fingers carefully around the handle of her brassie in an interlocking grip?

It was just at this point that Mrs. Penhallo said, "Bah!" and again, "Bah!"

Prof. Penhallo tinkled the ice in his glass once more and remarked: "You are in close conjunction with the sound, my dear, effected by a tremulous of the palate, will produce a more realistic imitation of the character of the alarm-call of the mother goose."

Mrs. Penhallo did not deign to look at her husband.

The scheming little—little flapper, she said, "Think of Gussie's willing himself to be subjected to the will of that bold little minx!"

"But, my dear," said the professor, "Gussie seems to be enjoying it. There are many in enjoying yourself with a pretty girl? She is pretty, you know."

"So is a French doll," said his wife. "What does she want him for? Why can't she pick up some of her own kind?"

"The desire of the moth for the star," smiled the professor.

"I shall speak to Gussie tonight," Mrs. Penhallo said.

"What if I wanted him to go right on playing with Peggy?"

"You think I have no influence with my son?"

"I think perhaps you overestimate your knowledge of young men," the professor replied. "But as you please. Perhaps Peggy will take me over as a partner."

IS eyes followed the retreating figures of his son and Miss Peggy Price, his glance oddly wistful. Mrs. Penhallo's eyes, too, were following the retreating figures.

They were so far away, however, that she could not see the large, rosy eyes of Peggy looking up into the face of Augustus, Jr., and certainly she could not hear the soft, caressing voice of Peggy exclaim: "I don't see how you can play golf so well when you know so much!"

This appeared to amuse the Emperor. "Is education a drawback to golf?" he inquired.

"Why, of course," said the girl. "You ever see a Phi Beta Kappa key in a first sixteen—except on your own watchchain?"

The Emperor reflected seriously. "No, I don't believe I ever did. It is rather odd that high bodily co-ordination doesn't seem to go with high mental co-ordination. I must talk it over with father."

Miss Peggy tried a brassie shot, and stood fearfully. "It sometimes doesn't go with low mental co-ordination, either," she laughed. "I haven't brains enough to read a timetable; yet I can't play golf."

"A great many extremely intelligent people find timetables very perplexing," said the Emperor, reassuringly. "And you forget then to use the grip I showed you, and you look your club too far back."

"Dear, I'm in such a bother! You'll have to show me all over again!" And she smiled apologetically at him.

He showed her again, and took her fingers in his and placed them correctly around the grip. He found this task strangely pleasant. Out of the corner of his eye he could see her red, laughing lips. He turned his eyes fully upon her face, and she too raised hers. He grew red.

"I'm afraid I'm a clumsy teacher," he said.

"I know I'm a clumsy pupil," she answered. "I'm just as stupid about everything. I'm an awful little fool. You ask your mother."

"My mother?" The Emperor looked puzzled.

But Peggy was preparing now to make her shot. She got off a good one.

"That's the stuff!" cried Gussie. "That's fine! Who said you couldn't play golf? We'll have you round under a hundred yet!"

"But I can only do it when you show me how," said Peggy.

Gussie laughed. "Then you'll have to play with me all the time, won't you?"

"You'd get pretty sick of that," she answered soberly. "Not so much of my golf as of your chatter."

Gussie managed a bold look into her eyes. "I don't think so," she declared.

"Yes, yes, you would. My eyes open, and shut, but I'm really full of sawdust—or something worse. I'm the terrible, flip new generation, you know."

"Ain't I the new generation too?" the Emperor demanded, forgetful of grammar.

Peggy laughed and shook her head. "You are wise with the wisdom of all the generations," she answered. "Oh, come now, the young man deprecates. A Ph. D. doesn't mean all that."

"What does a Ph. D. mean?" inquired the Emperor.

So they played no more that afternoon, but sat beneath a willow tree on the bank of the river, and the Emperor discoursed on many things, including his plans for teaching romance languages; and Peggy, who spoke only one romance language, looked into his face and spoke it. In the course of time, there being no other players adjacent, the Emperor took her hand. Her fingers closed about his own.

He ceased speaking of romance languages.

"You are such a bright-plumaged little bird," he half-whispered. "Why do you hum around with a drab old grackle like me?"

The girl leaned against him with a tiny laugh. "I suspect maybe I like you a bit," she answered.

Gussie looked quickly over his shoulder. He saw a man in a light-colored coat, and obeyed his primal instinct. He saw her eyes close. He closed his own. Their lips were the sweetest, most rapturous sensation he had ever experienced.

AT dinner Mrs. Penhallo said nothing to her son regarding his name or his partner. But to her surprise and evident annoyance, his father did.

"Have a good match, son?" he asked.

"Not exactly a match," Penhallo, Jr., replied in a casual tone. "I'm trying to teach Peggy."

"I noticed you are changing her grip," his father pursued.

"Yes," the Emperor managed. "The interlocking grip is the only one to use."

"Humph!" It escaped from his mouth.

Gussie looked up. He remembered Peggy's words: "Ask your mother."

"What's the matter with Peggy, me?" he abruptly demanded.

This was a line of attack Mrs. Penhallo was unprepared for.

"Nothing," she answered at all, dear. "Why?"

"But ma, you know you don't say 'Humph' merely about the interlocking grip. You don't know what an interlocking grip is."

"I know better than I did," his mother could not refrain from replying.

"I find Peggy extremely entertaining and attractive," her son said. "I am going to play with her in the mixed foursomes on Saturday."

The Emperor could be cool and final, when he chose. He was, after all, his mother's son. She realized that, and changed the subject.

"I wonder whom Lucy Briggs will play with," she asked.

Gussie had expected three days ago to play with Lucy himself. He knew that Lucy had probably expected it. "I'm sure I don't know," he replied.

"If Lucy would play with me, I might win something at last," his father remarked. "Lucy is a good golfer. She concentrates on her shots."

"Lucy does everything efficiently," said Mrs. Penhallo.

"I'm a bit fed up on efficiency," snapped the Emperor.

"You wouldn't be fed up at all if we didn't have an efficient cook," said his mother.

"And an efficient housekeeper," said the professor, with a gallant bow toward his partner.

Their son wavered this aside, and presently departed from the house. They heard the engine of his car roar into the driveway.

THE pairing of Peggy and the Emperor for the mixed foursomes caused some amused comment among the members in the Southmead Country Club.

They practiced every day. Their method of training, however, was unique. It consisted of a few holes of golf, alternated with long rests beneath the willows. The professor, observing, said nothing. But he smiled.

On Saturday, however, the Emperor came to the clubhouse determined to attain, if not the prize, at least a high place in the scoring. He was there for business. But Peggy seemed unimpressed by the gravity of the occasion. She bubbled on the first tee. She said she just couldn't remember how to lock her fingers. She spoke words of encouragement to her ball in baby talk.

They were playing with Cyrus Curtin, a dignified banker, and his daughter, Nell.

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"Try my way," said Nell. "I don't aim at all."

Gussie gritted his teeth. He wheeled in silence, and laid into his drive with a tremendous wallop of 200 yards.

"My partner, ladies and gentlemen," Peggy announced with a flourish. "Who'd you go?" the Emperor cut in curtly.

"Why are you so cross, Mr. Emperor?" Peggy demanded softly.

"I'm not cross," he snapped. "But for Heaven's sake, play golf. We want to get somewhere in this tournament."

"I didn't know you could be so—so—horrid. You are an emperor—in that respect," she snapped back with sudden spirit.

"And I didn't know you could be so silly," he retorted.

Having said so much, they said more. And then they said nothing at all. Peggy's golf grew more and more terrible. The Emperor concentrated on his own game, with grim determination. He reeled off hole after hole in par. He made miracle shots which, ordinarily, would have filled him with elation. But now, as they met on the green after one of the holes, he couldn't help seeing Peggy's red lips, or her hands clasped around her club, or the soft nape of her neck as she bent to putt. It was an unhappy afternoon. Cyrus and his daughter could hardly be having a hilarious time, either.

When the eighteen holes were at last over, and the scores turned in, the Emperor and Peggy found themselves second from the bottom. Never before in his life had he seen his name at the bottom of a score board.

Peggy looked at him narrowly, and at length spoke.

"You don't like to be at the bottom, do you?" she said.

"Does anybody?" he replied.

"She laughed. 'My word! You men are such babies. What difference does it make?'"

"It's the difference between doing what you set out to do well, and doing it badly," said he gravely. "You can't understand that, can you?"

"Perhaps I can," she answered. "If what I set out to do really matters."

"But I happen to think that golf matters," he said.

"Yes, dear old thing, I know you do," she answered, and pouted her red lips at him, and laughed mockingly with her eyes.

"Did you see that? You men are so stupid. What difference does it make?"

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